

January 3, 2006
Milton, Florida

The Marine Advisory Committee met on the above date with the following members present: Chairman Ken Johnson, Vice Chairman Pasco Gibson, and members Dan Wakley and Robert Turpin. Also present were the County Administrator (Hunter Walker), Public Works Director (Avis Whitfield), and Marine Extension Agent (Christina Verlinde). Chairman Johnson called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

Turpin moved approval of the minutes from the December 6, 2005 meeting; Wakley seconded, and the vote carried unanimously (4-0).

Discussion of 20 Year Waterway Public Access Strategic Plan

Johnson distributed a list of his fifteen suggestions regarding a Long Range Waterway Usage and Access Plan (Attachment in File). He said some of his ideas are immediate solutions, some are 20 year projects, and some are pipe dreams. Johnson reviewed each of his strategic plan suggestions in detail.

Turpin said Johnson's specific suggestions can be divided into two different categories (1) Access and utilization of waterways and (2) Maintaining and improving upon the ecological and biological integrities of the waterways. He said he felt the strategic plan should be the framework where these types of suggestions will fit. Turpin said the benefit of a strategic plan is to give an overall vision, and the suggestions are plugged into the vision when the timing is right. He suggested the committee establish the framework of the strategic plan and apply the individual components within that framework keeping the plan a living and workable document that has applications for current year, 10 year goals, and 20 year goals.

Wakley agreed with Turpin regarding initiatives up to 20 years into the future. He said the committee has two goals. Wakley said the first goal is to protect the water, and the second goal is to keep access to the water. He said Johnson's ideas are fantastic.

Johnson said the Operating By-Laws set up what the Marine Advisory Committee is and will be (Attachment in File). He said most of the things the committee wishes to do are stopped by State and Federal regulations. Johnson said tonight he would like to hear ideas from the other committee members and take the first step towards developing a strategic plan.

Turpin said the committee can look at a range of ideas and breakdown these ideas into timeframes. He suggested the committee make a broad distinction between the first category to include waterways, shoreline, aquatic life, and the biological conditions of the water and the second category addressing how that environment is utilized today and how the committee foresees future uses. He said these two broad categories will help the committee stay focused and communicate their ideas.

Wakley said the strategic plan should consist of short term (1-2 years), medium term (3-5 years), and long term (6-20 years) goals. He said this committee has done a poor job of getting things done. Wakley said grants are the largest source of funding and the committee has nothing planned for the next grant cycle. He said he felt Santa Rosa County should hire a dedicated Marine Resources person somewhat like Robert Turpin's position in Escambia County. Wakley said meeting once a month is ineffective. Turpin discussed his responsibilities and said in Escambia County there is a Marine Division with several staff members.

Wakley discussed the possibility of a tri-county effort that will create a much greater force when applying for grant funds. He said Escambia, Santa Rosa, and Okaloosa Counties depend on the waterways and tourism. Johnson said the county can hire a person that has legal authority to act as a code enforcement officer for the waterways. He suggested using University of West Florida interns from the Oceans Science Division. Johnson said things learned in the classroom can be used in a practical setting with field studies. Wakley said Santa Rosa County does not have a contact person for marine resources.

Turpin asked Walker his thoughts regarding a marine position. Walker asked what the marine person will do. He said permits are applied for in the Public Works Department, and the Planning Department is working on increasing recreation plans. Turpin said the county works to provide and maintain infrastructure for marine needs, and he felt a marine position will be a good return on the investment. He said it will take a lot of thought as to what the position will involve. Walker said Santa Rosa County is not noted for having a lot of staff. He said the county can look at the specifics of where the marine person will fit in the organizational chart and what the position will include. Turpin said the county can possibly outsource professionals to handle marine issues.

Gibson said eventually a manager will have to fit in the picture if a strategic plan is created. He said the 20 year plan can be in place before the position is developed. Gibson said due to water resources the county has sufficient work to keep a marine resources person busy. He said the natural resources throughout the county need to be utilized. Turpin requested the framework of the strategic plan along with a logical timeline be developed at the next meeting.

Gibson said a timeframe needs to be in place with divisions such as an environmental division, a usage division, and an expansion division. He said a water park will be great in the north end of the county. Gibson said each member can present their preliminary plan at the next meeting for review and discussion. He said the strategic plan will take several meetings.

Johnson said he would like to see each of the committee members develop a timeline of how the plan can be set up. He said the first part of next month's meeting can be dedicated to ideas for the upcoming grant, and the second part of the meeting can be used to refine individual ideas to make up the strategic plan.

Other Business/Adjournment

Verlinde said the Artificial Reef Grant has to be submitted by April 2006 (Attachment in File). Walker said the original purpose of the Marine Advisory Committee was to get proper input from users on the Artificial Reef Grant.

Turpin discussed a suggestion received from Liz Bush regarding extending the dock landward and adding concrete to the boat ramp at the Bagdad Oyster Pile ramp. Gibson said there are two ramps at the Oyster Shell ramp. Whitfield said one ramp is oyster shell and the other ramp is concrete. He said the concrete ramp drops off so the oyster shell ramp is the better ramp. Turpin said Bush suggested a floating dock that will move up or down with the tide. Johnson said the committee may want to consider the floating dock as a future project. He requested Whitfield contact Bush regarding this issue.

Gibson said he has pursued securing a location to stock pile shell for the Oyster Restoration Project. He said after talking to several people along the river he did not receive any definite answers. Gibson said he felt the old pre-stress concrete site, that is already equipped for barges, will be approved for this use. He asked the timeframe of the project. Verlinde said the project

will occur in February or March. She said the schools have been involved throughout the entire restoration project. There was discussion regarding the "Offer Your Shell for Restoration project" where local restaurants are saving their oyster shells for the project. Gibson said he wants to make sure the shells are placed in a productive place.

Johnson requested the Oyster Restoration Project be first on next month's agenda with the Artificial Reef Grant second, and the Strategic Plan last on the agenda.

Turpin said at 5:00 p.m. on January 10, 2006 a public information meeting is scheduled for the Oriskony Reef Project at Haggler Auditorium, Pensacola Junior College. He said the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) has issued a draft authorization to allow the ship to be deployed as a reef with the existing materials on board. Turpin said the meeting is to allow citizens to get information and provide public input. He said anyone interested is welcome to attend the meeting or they can go to EPA's website to provide written comments. Johnson reminded the committee members to be mindful of the Florida Sunshine Law.

Election of 2006 Chair/Vice-Chair

Turpin nominated Marker as Chairman and the motion died due to the lack of a second.

Wakley moved to nominate Johnson as Chairman; Gibson seconded, and the vote carried by majority vote with Gibson, Turpin, and Wakley in favor. Johnson opposed. (3-1)

Turpin moved to nominate Marker as Vice-Chairman; Gibson seconded, and the vote carried unanimously (4-0).

The next scheduled meeting of the Marine Advisory Committee is February 6, 2006 at 5:00 p.m.

There being no further business to come before the Marine Advisory Committee at this time, the meeting adjourned at 6:20 p.m.